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ABSTRACT

Observations suggest that 12-month-old children show little evidence of possession rules, while 18- and 24-month-olds are still coming to differentiate purely personal possession rules from shared possession rules that take into account the other child's status or rights as a possessor. Children 12 months old exhibited the highest frequency of attempts to take one another's toys and the lowest frequency of positive object contacts such as sharing, joint play, and cooperation. For 24-month-olds, the pattern was reversed; children 18 months old fell intermediate between the youngest and oldest children in the sample. Oldest children more frequently mediated their possession exchanges with language, particularly with self-possession related language. Children 12 months of age were equally likely to resist attempts to take their toy, regardless of how long they themselves had been in possession of it or whether the taker had previously played with the toy. Children 18 and 24 months old were more likely to resist an attempt by another to take possession of a toy when the taker had not previously played with it, and least likely to resist if the taker had played with the toy extensively during the previous 30 minutes. The 24-month-olds also resisted more intensely if the taker had not had prior possession, and they additionally differentiated between whether the taker had played with the toy only briefly or for an extended period. (RH)

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Age Differences in Object Conflicts and Possession Negotiations During the Second Year

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INTRODUCTION

Investigators have recently become interested in the toddler's developing understanding of rules that regulate social exchange with peers, particularly those regulating object possession. Evidence suggests that during the second year children begin to acquire the mutual understanding that current or previous possession of an object grants the possessor a "prior right" or "claim" to continued or future possession. Evidence for the existence of such a "prior possession rule" has been the child's success in retaining or regaining possession of an object, and/or the likelihood of resistance to an "attempt-take", as a function of current or previous use of that object (Bakeman & Brownlee, 1982; Bronson, 1981). Bronson (1981) examined whether a possessor was more likely to resist an attempted take, and whether the taker was more likely to succeed upon resistance by the possessor, as a function of duration of possession and the possessor's degree of involvement with the toy. She found that both duration of possession and degree of involvement predicted resistance by the possessor in younger as well as older toddlers, although the likelihood of any resistance at all was greater for older (17-24 mos.) than for younger (12-16 mos.) children. The taker's likelihood of success differed as a function of duration of possession, and not the posessor's degree of involvement, but that relationship held only for the oldest toddlers (21-24 mos.).

So, in Bronson's sample both younger and older possessors were more likely to resist a peer's attempt to take their toys if they have had the toy for some time, and if they are fully engaged with it. Although younger toddlers are less likely to resist in the first place, such resistance is usually successful in retaining possession regardless of previous or existing

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circumstances; not so among older toddlers who usually resist, and for whom having just picked up a toy makes it more likely the taker will be able to wrest possession.

Bakeman and Brownlee (1982) looked for the existence of a shared vs. purely personal possession rule from a different angle -- whether the taker had previously had possession of the toy. They reasoned that if the children mutually observed prior possession rights, then a taker should be less likely to be resisted and should be more likely to be successful if she had had prior possession than if not. They found that prior possession by the taker predicted success, but not the likelihood of resistance, for their toddlers (12-24 mos.; X = 18.4 mos.). They thus concluded that toddlers did not appear to hold shared possession rules, i.e., recognition of other's rights as well as one's own.

However suggestive, the evidence is still meager, with only one of the two existing studies examining age differences over the 2nd year, neither study examining possession rules from both the taker's and possessor's perspectives, and neither study examining the presumed positive consequences of shared understanding of possession rights, such as cooperation, turn-taking, sharing, etc. Given that over the 2nd year toddlers are coming to differentiate fully between self and other as part of the cognitive change known as decentration (Piaget, 1954), and given that shared possession rules require at least that toddler peers recognize one another as independent agents, we should expect to see age changes in the apparent use of possession rules during that period. Indeed, it is possible that possession negotiation may be one of the initial "proving grounds" of developing self-other relations in early peer interaction.

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METHODS

Two 4-child mixed-sex (balanced) playgroups were followed during weekly, 1-1/2 hour playsessions from 18 to 24 months. An additional group of 12 month old boys was also observed. Children were first-born, with minimal prior peer experience, and were videotaped in a large furnished lab playroom with mothers present. Observations reported were taken from 2 sessions per age/playgroup. Videotapes were event-sampled for all instances of object-related interaction between 2 or more children. Event categories included attempt-take (from another); resist-take + intensity (scale = 1 to 4); positive object negotiation (coop.; share; jt. play; etc.); language-mediation, including self-possession ("mine!"), other possession ("that's Sarah's"), and requests for toys; positive and negative physical contact; duration of possession by possessor (0; .2-30 sec; >30 secs); duration of prior possession (same as above) by taker within previous 30 min. (See Appendix A). Inter-observer reliability was established at .85 or higher.

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RESULTS

1. General Charasteristics of Possession Negotiations (see Figure 1)

(all dependent variables are proportions of total object-related social events; all significant F's at $p \leq .05$).

A. Attempts to take other's toys: Highest at 12 months; lowest at 24 months.

B. Resistance to attempt-take: No reliable age difference.

C. Successful takes: Lowest at 12 months; highest at 24 months.

D. Positive possession negotiations: Highest at 24 months; lowest at 12 months.

E. Verbal mediation: Highest at 24 months.

F. Self-possession assertions: Highest at 24 months.

G. Other-possession assertions/requests from other: No reliable age difference.

H. Positive physical contact: Highest at 12 months.

I. Negative physical contact: No reliable age difference.

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2. Owner's Resistance to Attempt-take as Function of Owner's Length of Possession, or Taker's Prior Possession.

(Dependent variables were absolute frequencies, but data are presented as proportions for clarity; all significant X2 at $p \leq .06$).

A. Owner's length of possession: (see Figure 2)

1) 12 month olds: no significant relationship

2) 18 month olds: no significant relationship

3) 24 month olds: no significant relationship

B. Taker's prior possession: (see Figure 3)

1) 12 month olds: no significant relationship

2) 18 month olds: most likely to resist when taker has not previously played with toy

3) 24 month olds: most likely to resist when taker has not previously played with toy or has played with it only briefly; least likely when taker has previously had toy for lengthy period.

C. Intensity of resistance as function of taker's prior possession: (see Figure 3).

1) 12 month olds: no significant relationship

2) 18 month olds: no significant relationship; resistance always more likely to be mild.

3) 24 month olds: more likely to resist intensely if taker has not previously played with toy.

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DISCUSSION

These data suggest that 12-month olds show little evidence of possession rules, while 18- and 24-month-olds are still coming to differentiate purely personal possession rules ("what's mine is mine, and what's yours is mine") from shared possession rules that take into account the other child's status or rights as a possessor.

Twelve month olds exhibit the highest frequency of attempts to take one another's toys and the lowest frequency of positive object contacts such as sharing, joint play, and cooperation. For 24-month olds the pattern is reversed; 18-month olds fall intermediate between the youngest and the oldest. Additionally, the oldest children more frequently mediate their possession exchanges with language, particularly with self-possession related language. Twelve-month olds are equally likely to resist attempts to take their toy, regardless of how long they themselves have been in possession of it or whether the taker has previously played with the toy. Eighteen and 24-month olds also resist attempt-takes equally as often regardless of the length of their own possession of a toy. But they apparently have begun to distinguish when it may be more, or less, appropriate for a taker to attempt to regain possesion of a toy. That is, they are most likely to resist an attempt-take when the taker has not previously played with it, and least likely to resist if the taker has played with the toy extensively during the prior 30 minutes. The 24-month olds also resist more intensely if the taker has not had prior possession, and they additionally differentiate between whether the taker has played with the toy only briefly or for an extended period.

These data do not precisely mirror Bronson's or Bakeman and Brownlee's.

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There are numerous possible reasons for this failure to replicate, two in particular most likely. First, their samples were quite different from the present one. Bronson's sample had had varying amounts of peer experiences, and Bakeman's was a day care sample of peer-experienced children who were familiar with one another. In the present sample, the 12- and 18-month olds had had little previous experience and were unfamiliar with one another. Thus one task for future research is to tease apart age-related effects on possession rules from the effects of peer experience and familiarity. A second possible reason for the discrepancy between our results and those of Bronson, and Bakeman and Brownlee, is that we have focused on 3 ages in particular. While Bronson broke her data down by trimesters over the second year, Bakeman and Brownlee combined data for 12 to 24 month olds. A second task for future research, then, is to specify more precisely age changes over the second year in understanding of possession rights and the regulation of object exchange. A third focus of subsequent research must be on contextual or other factors that may interact with age changes in the acquisition of possession rules. Bronson, for example, examined the effects of "toy involvement", and Bakeman, the effects of "dominance". We are now collecting data on the role of adult interventions in possession negotiations, and the role of permanent vs. temporary ownership toys. Finally, insofar as the development of self-other relations over the second year, research must begin to systematically investigate such relationships.

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APPENDIX A

POSSESSION NEGOTIATION CODING CATEGORIES

1. Attempt take: Instances where joiner/taker displaces other child from toy(s) and takes over ownership of toy(s) or disrupts other child's activity with toy(s).

2. Resist take: Protest or physical resistance to attempt-take; degrees of intensity subtitled 1, 2, 3, 4.

3. Positive object negotiation: Share; cooperate to work toward goal; attempt to help; wait turn; offer/give/show toy to other; "need relevant offer".

4. Language: Verbalization or vocalization (in connection with object negotiations only) including verbal protest; self possession (e.g., "mine"); other possession ("Jon's bottle"); request (question).

5. Positive physical contact: Touch, hug, kiss, etc.; only in context of object negotiation.

6. Negative physical contact: Strike, bite, pull hair, etc.; only in context of object negotiation.

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APPENDIX A

POSSESSION NEGOTIATION CODING CATEGORIES

1. ATTEMPT TAKE: INSTANCES WHERE JOINER/TAKER DISPLACES OTHER CHILD FROM TOY(S) AND TAKES OVER OWNERSHIP OF TOY(S) OR DISRUPTS OTHER CHILD'S ACTIVITY WITH TOY(S).

2. RESIST TAKE: PROTEST OR PHYSICAL RESISTANCE TO ATTEMPT-TAKE; DEGREES OF INTENSITY SUBTITLED 1, 2, 3, 4.

3. POSITIVE OBJECT NEGOTIATION: SHARE; COOPERATE TO WORK TOWARD GOAL; ATTEMPT TO HELP; WAIT TURN; OFFER/GIVE/SHOW TOY TO OTHER; "NEED RELEVANT OFFER"

4. LANGUAGE: VERBALIZATION OR VOCALIZATION (IN CONNECTION WITH OBJECT NEGOTIATIONS ONLY) INCLUDING VERBAL PROTEST; SELF POSSESSION (E.G., MINE); OTHER POSSESSION (JON'S, VINNIE'S, JON'S BOTTLE)/REQUEST (QUESTION)

5. POSITIVE PHYSICAL CONTACT: TOUCH, HUG, KISS, ETC.; ONLY IN CONTEXT OF OBJECT NEGOTIATION

6. NEGATIVE PHYSICAL CONTACT: STRIKE, BITE, PULL HAIR, ETC.; ONLY IN CONTEXT OF OBJECT NEGOTIATION

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RESULTS

1. General Characteristics of Possession Negotiations (see Figure 1)
(all dependent variables are proportions of total object-related social events; all significant F's at $P \leq .05$)

   A. Attempts to take other's toys: highest at 12 months; lowest at 24 months.

   B. Resistance to attempt-take: no reliable age difference.

   C. Successful takes: lowest at 12 months; highest at 24 months.

   D. Positive possession negotiations: highest at 24 months; lowest at 12 months.

   E. Verbal mediation: highest at 24 months.

   F. Self-possession assertions: highest at 24 months.

   G. Other-possession assertions/requests from other: no reliable age difference.

   H. Positive physical contact: highest at 12 months.

   I. Negative physical contact: no reliable age difference.

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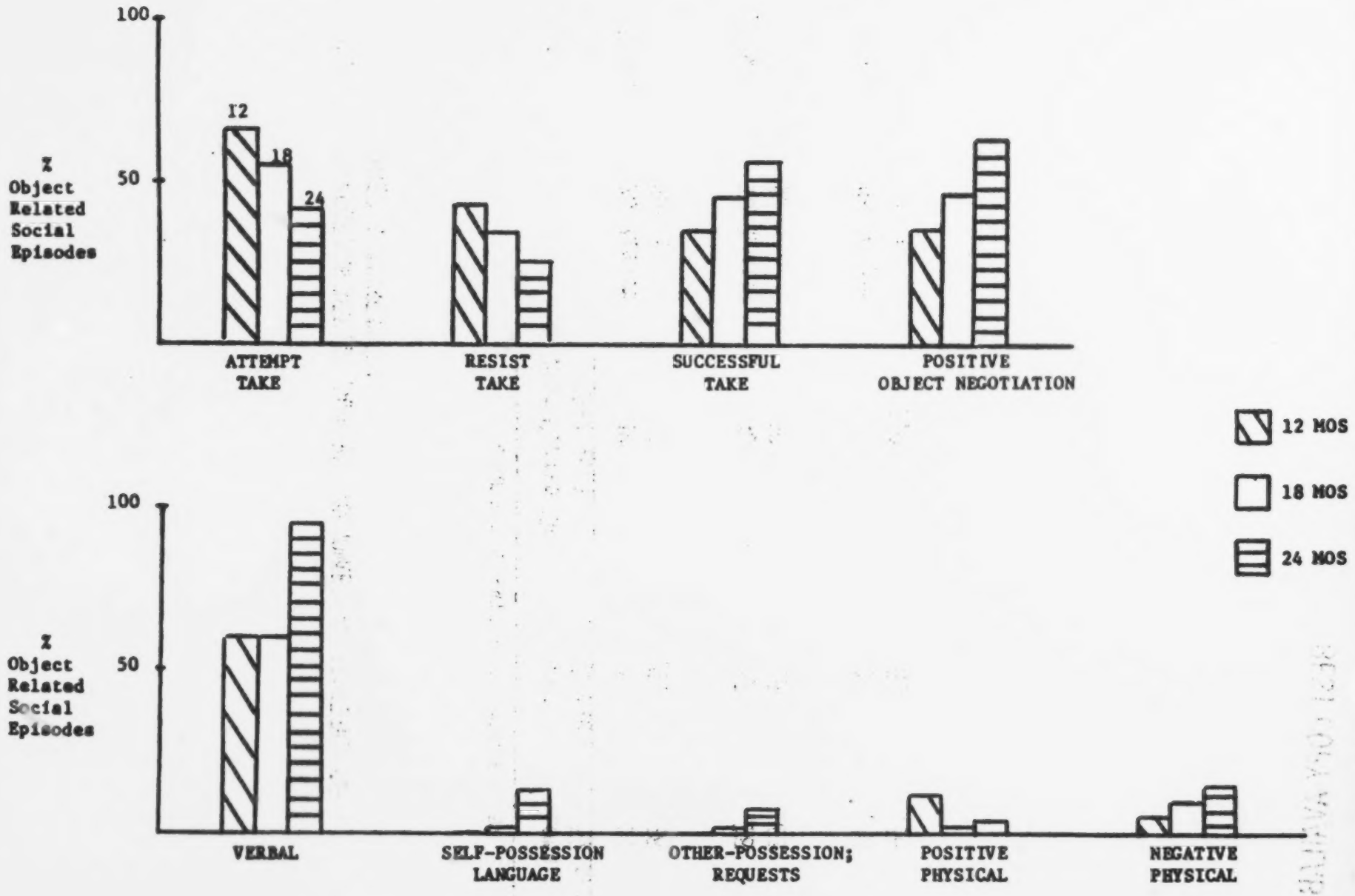

FIGURE 1: GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF POSSESSION NEGOTIATION

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TABLE 2. PROPORTION RESIST TAKE BY TOY OWNER AS FUNCTION OF OWNER'S POSSESSION

Age		Owner's Duration of Possession		
		Just Picked Up (0-2 sec)	Short (3-31 sec)	Long (> 39 sec)
12 mo.	No Resist	.48	.38	.12
	Resist	.52	.62	.88
18 mo.	No Resist	.40	.37	.38
	Resist	.60	.63	.62
24 mo.	No Resist	0	.35	.44
	Resist	1.0	.65	.56

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TABLE 3. PROPORTION RESIST TAKE BY TOY OWNER AS A FUNCTION OF TAKER'S PRIOR POSSESSION

Age		Taker's Prior Possession (w/in previous 30 min)		
		No Prior Poss.	Short (1-30 Secs)	Long (>30 Secs)
12 mo.	No Resist	0	.32	.47
	Resist	0	.68	.53
18 mo.	No Resist	.34	.80	.75
	Resist	.66	.20	.25
	Mild	.82	1.0	1.0
	Intense	.18	0	0
24 mo.	No Resist	.26	.33	.73
	Resist	.74	.67	.27
	Mild	.64	.89	1.0
	Intense	.36	.11	0

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